

**THE TAILOR-BIRD AND ITS NEST.**

THE man who first invented sewing in all probability thought that he had discovered, or rather created, an art which was entirely new, and that to him alone was due the credit of perceiving the virtues of a fibre thrust through holes.

The capabilities of his invention he could not be expected to foresee, inasmuch as he would in all probability limit its powers to the decoration rather than the clothing of his own

person. In the process of time he might comprehend that, by means of the needle and thread, a number of small leaves or skins might be made to serve the same purpose as a single large one, and as his instruments improved, so would his work. There are, it is true, certain nations who have been acquainted with the art of sewing from time immemorial, and never seem to have made the least progress in it. The native Australian, for example, displays wonderful ingenuity in making thread from the sinews of the kangaroo's tail, and needles from the emu's bones; but there his invention seems



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to have stopped, and, up to the present time, the junction of a couple of kangaroo skins, or the sewing together of a few "opossum" furs, seem to be the limits of his powers. Still, in other countries, the needle and thread have, as a rule, exhibited a regular improvement, until they have culminated in the sewing-machine of our own day and country. Had, however, some good genius enabled the original founder of the art to foresee its effect upon the world, he might well have been proud of his discovery, the earliest of human arts.

The respectable guild of tailors, indeed, were wont to attribute to their mystery an antiquity surpassing that of any other handicraft, and, on the strength of a certain passage in Genesis, claimed Adam as the first tailor. As to the smiths and musicians, the tailors looked down upon them as of comparatively recent origin, and considered even the mysterious order of Freemasons as modern upstarts. Had they been moderately skilled in ornithology, they might have claimed a still older origin, for the reasons that, long before man came on the earth, the needle and the thread were used for sewing two objects together.

The wonderful little bird, whose portrait is accurately given in the accompanying illustration, is popularly known by the appropriate title of TAILOR-BIRD, its scientific name being *Orthotomus longicaudus*. The manner in which it constructs its pensile nest is very singular. Choosing a convenient leaf, generally one which hangs from the end of a slender twig, it pierces a row of holes along each edge, using its beak in the same manner that a shoemaker uses his awl, the two instruments being very similar to each other in shape, though not in material. These holes are not at all regular, and in some cases there are so many of them, that the bird seems to have found some special gratification in making them, just as a boy who has a new knife makes havoc on every piece of wood which he can obtain.

When the holes are completed, the bird next procures its thread, which is a long fibre of some plant, generally much longer than is needed for the task which it performs. Having found its thread, the feathered tailor begins to pass it through the holes, drawing the sides of the leaf towards each other, so as to form a kind of hollow cone, the point downwards. Generally a single leaf is used for this purpose, but whenever the bird cannot find one that is sufficiently large, it sews two together, or even fetches another leaf and fastens it with the fibre. Within the hollow thus formed the bird next deposits a quantity of soft white down, like short cotton wool, and thus constructs a warm, light, and elegant nest, which is scarcely visible among the leafage of the tree, and which is safe from almost every foe except man.

There are several nests of the Tailor-bird in the British Museum, one composed of several leaves, and the other in which one leaf is used. It is a pity that in all instances the leaf has been plucked from the twig on which it grew; and it is to be wished that when specimens are brought to our museums the twig will be cut off, and that, if the leaf should fall off, it may be replaced on the spot whereon it grew. Beautiful as is the detached nest, it does not give nearly so vivid an idea of its object as if it were still suspended to its branch.

The Tailor-bird is a native of India, and is tolerably familiar, haunting the habitations of man, and being often seen in the gardens and compounds, feeding away in conscious security. It seems to care little about lofty situations, and mostly prefers the ground, or lower branches of the trees, and flies to and fro with a peculiar undulating flight. Many species of the same genus are known to ornithologists.

